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SUBJECT: A GUIDE TO RUSSIAN POLITICAL YOUTH GROUPS: PART 1
OF 2

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11. (C) SUMMARY. This is part one of a two-part message describing Russian political youth groups. This cable contains a summary of the major political youth movements in Russia. Russian political youth groups can be broadly divided into two categories: grassroots organizations driven by idealism, and Kremlin-sponsored organizations aimed at marginalizing those groups and avoiding an "Orange Revolution" in Russia. The groups most likely to have an effect on Russian politics are the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) and the Kremlin-sponsored Molodaya Gvardiya. More radical groups like the Young Bolsheviks, while small in number, get attention because of their penchant for direct action, such as storming government buildings. Russia's youth is overwhelmingly apolitical; most youth groups are, and will likely remain, a sideshow in Russian politics. END SUMMARY.

Ideological Groups

12. (U) The nationalists/skinheads, democrats, and communists are very different in their beliefs, but all possess characteristics of authentic grassroots movements. They vary widely in their organization, level of activism, and political goals. In general, the democrats strive for a place in the political firmament, the nationalists strive to influence policy, and the communists appear to be lost in the past.

Nationalists and Skinheads

13. (U) Nationalist groups are xenophobic and rally around the slogan "Russia for Russians." The most popular and active nationalist groups are the Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) with 2,000 members, the Russian All-People Union (RONS), the Russian National Unity (1,500 members), People's National Party, Slavic Union, and the National Socialist Society. DPNI, led by 30 year-old Aleksandr Belov, has been growing in popularity and recognition. He figured most recently in the November 4 Russia March (reftel). Although both the federal and Moscow city governments prohibited the march, Belov assembled more than 1,000 people in Moscow. While this was only a fraction of his stated goal of 10,000, it is large in comparison with the meager crowds that other grassroots youth groups have been able to produce.

14. (U) Skinheads in Russia lack any formal national organization. Russian law prohibits them from distributing extremist literature, and prohibits Russian internet providers from hosting their webpages. Estimates of the number of skinheads vary. The Moscow Human Rights Bureau

projects 50,000 skinheads in 85 cities in Russia. Skinheads are especially active in the Moscow suburbs (estimated 10,000), St. Petersburg (estimated 1,000), Nizhniy Novgorod, Yaroslavl, and Voronezh. Vladimir Pribylovskiy of the Panorama Information Center told us that the St. Petersburg skinheads are fewer in number but more violent than their Moscow brethren. "In Moscow, they beat up immigrants, in St. Petersburg, they murder them."

Democratic Groups

15. (C) Youth Yabloko (300-1000 members) was created in 1995 by the Yabloko party. It works closely with the party, which provides a majority of its funding. It is led by the 23 year-old Ilya Yashin, who claims 1,000 active members in 10 different regions. Youth Yabloko holds protests, campaigns for Yabloko candidates, plans to hold a summer camp for activists with the like-minded DA!, and plans to publish a small newspaper called "Freedom Street." While upbeat and animated, Yashin is not optimistic about the future of either the Yabloko party or himself. He will campaign in the March 2007 elections in St. Petersburg, but "if Yabloko does not win seats there, it will no longer be a political party, but just a movement." He said that for himself, "the best-case scenario is that I'm not in jail four years from now."

16. (U) Oborona (300 members) was an effort to combine the strengths of the liberal, pro-Western groups Yabloko and the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS). Oborona has been plagued by infighting and almost theological disagreements about democracy. Soon after they united, Yashin withdrew Yabloko from Oborona's Moscow branch. SPS soon after pulled out of the St. Petersburg branch. Yashin told us that "Oborona is

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funded by oligarchs, and I don't agree with (SPS youth leader) Koslovskiy on that." According to Pribylovskiy, "In some places, Oborona is SPS, and in some places it is Yabloko, but it doesn't really matter because Oborona is dying."

17. (C) DA!: Mariya Gaydar, daughter of former Prime Minister Yegor Gaydar, leads DA! (Democratic Alternative). She is ardent in her promotion of democracy, but realistic about the obstacles she faces. Gaydar said that DA! is focused on non-partisan activities designed to raise political awareness. She has received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy, a fact she does not publicize for fear of appearing compromised by an American connection. She told us that DA! was a complement to Oborona, not a competitor, and is an effort to widen the democratic base. "People who would want to join Oborona would not want to join DA! and vice versa, but we work together for a common goal." Gaydar told us that DA! was more a forum for open discussion than a political movement. She has organized a series of debates among people with controversial viewpoints. She is also planning to hold a summer camp in 2007 to train up to 2000 students in the ways of democratic activism.

Communists

18. (U) The communists are also divided. The Union of Communist Youth (SKM) (700 members), is the official youth movement of the KPRF. They claim over 500,000 members, but Pribylovskiy told us that number is misleading since every member of the KPRF under the age of 28 is automatically registered in SKM. Vasily Koltashov of SKM told us that very few SKM members are active, and those who are active often disagree with the KPRF and are attracted to other communist movements. SKM has held joint actions with other communist groups, but they have no formal association.

19. (U) Other communist groups are more radical than SKM. The Vanguard of the Red Youth (AKM) (500 members), the National

Bolshevik Party (NBP) (1,000 members in Moscow), and the National Bolshevik Front (NBF) are the most significant. The NBP, led by Eduard Limonov, is known for direct action, such as storming government ministries. Both NBP and AKM are becoming less confrontational. In the past, AKM activists sprayed water at Gorbachev, handcuffed themselves to form human chains and blocked traffic. Lately, they have cooperated with liberal groups against common opponents, as they did when they protested against the Russia March. The NBF, founded by Aleksandr Dugin, is an offshoot of the NBP. Dugin's goal is to thwart an overthrow of the government by "fugitive oligarchs together with liberal remnants and ultra-nationalists and Chekhists in the presidential entourage."

Kremlin-Sponsored Groups

¶10. (U) Some youth movements are linked to the Kremlin, and the United Russia party boasts three: Nashi ("Ours"), Molodaya Gvardiya ("Young Guards"), and Mestnye ("Locals"). According to Vladimir Pribylovskiy, Director of the Panorama Research Institute, the groups reflect divisions within United Russia, and the leaders of Nashi and Molodaya Gvardiya strongly dislike each other.

Molodaya Gvardiya

¶11. (U) Molodaya Gvardiya is the most polished of any Russian youth group, which is a testament to its budget, marketing, and Kremlin backing. It appeals to Russian youth by emphasizing fun activities and sanctioned protests, often with an anti-American or pro-Putin flavor. In the last year, for example, it organized a July 4th "Independence from America" demonstration across the street from the Embassy, an anti-Yushchenko protest in front of the Ukrainian embassy, and an anti-Saakashvili protest following the arrest of four Russian army officers in Georgia. Although TV personality Ivan Demidov is the face of Molodaya Gvardiya, the organization is led by the up-and-coming Andrey Turchak, the son of Anatoliy Turchak, a friend of Putin's from St. Petersburg, former Chairman of St. Petersburg's Nash Dom Rossiya party, and now Director General of Leninets, a defense avionics company. According to Pribylovskiy, other Molodaya Gvardiya leaders are similarly connected -- they are the sons and daughters of the elite.

¶12. (U) Molodaya Gvardiya has also been successful in actually helping young people become active in politics.

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During the last year, Molodaya Gvardiya has held a series of contests called Politzavod ("Political Factory") to find and develop candidates. In this successful combination of entertainment and politics, contestants participate in a "Survivor"-type contest where they organize public events and compete in speech contests before a voting audience. United Russia offers winners a position on their legislative party lists. In the October regional elections, United Russia fulfilled its pledge to fill 20 percent of its regional party lists with candidates under age 28 by using the winners of Politzavod. Thirty-one United Russia candidates between 21 and 28 years of age were elected.

Nashi (3,000 members)

¶13. (C) United Russia, which created Nashi, describes it as "a counterbalance to radical youth movements from the left and the right like those in Kiev and Tbilisi." According to Pribylovskiy, Nashi is the client organization of Vladislav Surkov, the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. Surkov funds Nashi, whose leader Yakimenko is a relative of Surkov's wife. Nashi generally opposes Moscow Mayor Yuriy

Luzhkov, but "they will support Luzhkov if directed to do so." The members of Nashi are generally younger and less wealthy than their Molodaya Gvardiya cousins. "Nashi members are not connected, but they want to become connected, and they are trying to work their way into the system," Pribylovskiy told us. According to several of our contacts, most Nashi protesters are paid (reportedly 100-300 rubles) to participate in protests.

Mestnye (1,000 members)

14. (U) Mestnye is lead by army veteran Sergey Fateyev and advertises itself as the "movement for young political ecologists of the Moscow suburbs." The name, along with its symbol of three trees on a green shield, is misleading since the group rarely addresses ecological issues. Instead, it focuses on opposing grassroots youth movements, often by imitating successful protests. For example, following a Youth Yabloko protest against the military draft, Mestnye staged a counter-protest. They claimed that they also favored some military reforms, but in general, they supported Putin. Mestnye has also been used to support Russian foreign policy by conducting protests at the U.S. and Georgian embassies.

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